This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

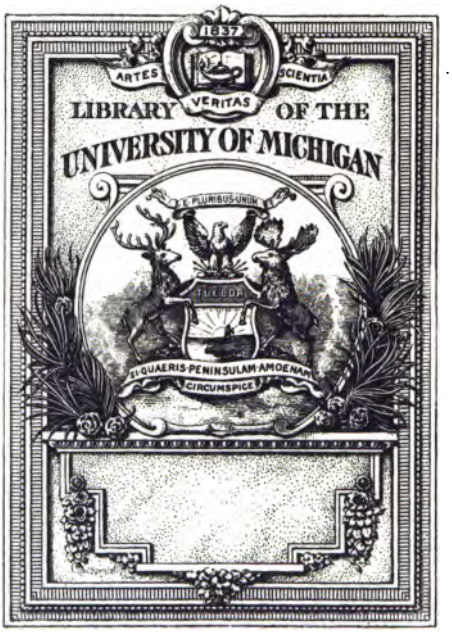
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HD
5119
.M62
P5

A 483863 DUPL

Percy-

Miners, and the Eight Hours Movement-


1837
ARTES
VERITAS
SCIENTIA
LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
E PLURIBUS UNUM
SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM
CIRCUMSPICE

HD
5119
.M62
P5

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

8 F 25

BY

C. Cornelius M. Accident PERCY, F.G.S.,

HONORARY MEMBER OF THE COBDEN CLUB;

AUTHOR OF

"MINE RENTS & MINERAL ROYALTIES."

WIGAN:
STROWGER AND SON, PRINTERS, CLARENCE YARD, WALLGATE.
1891.

DEDICATION.

TO THE MINERS

OF THE

UNITED KINGDOM

THESE LETTERS

ARE RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND

AND WELL WISHER,

THE AUTHOR.

38625

PREFACE.

DURING the months of January and February, of the present year, a very important Conference was held in London, to consider the proposed Eight Hours Working Day in Mines. The Conference was a very large and representative one of Colliery Proprietors and Miners, and the proceedings excited great public interest.

The letters constituting this Pamphlet appeared some of them during the Conference, and the remainder immediately after, and were widely read. Consenting to a general desire, they are now presented in this collective form, in the hope that they may be of some service in enabling the Miners in particular, and the public in general, to understand clearly what the Eight Hours proposal really means. Miners, I know, will be willing to read all that can be said for and against.

A good deal has been made, or tried to be made, of the fact that in Northumberland and Durham the Coal Hewers do not now work so much as eight hours per day. Still, they are strenuously opposed to a compulsory Eight Hours Day in Mining. WHY? I will endeavour to supply the answer in the words of a very able Mining Contributor to a leading provincial journal *(Manchester Guardian, Feb. 23rd, 1891.)*

"They—Northumberland and Durham—work on the Double Shift System, *the pits drawing coals ten or eleven hours per day, only one shift of boys* [*and daywage men*] *who work ten hours per day, being thus necessary.* The Eight Hours Bill would put all boys and daywage men upon an Eight Hours Day, and one of two things would happen to Northumberland and Durham: either two shifts of boys [and daywage men] would have to be employed which *would mean a great increase in working expenses, resulting in a great reduction of wages and an increase of coal hewers' hours,* or the double shift would have to be abandoned with the *result of throwing half the men employed in and about the mines out of employment,* and of *forcing those who remained to work eight hours in order that the thin seams of the district might compete with the thick seams of other districts.*"

That would appear to very much accentuate my arguments that an Eight Hours Day in Mines would *increase cost of production, reduce wages,* and *operate unequally, therefore unfairly.*

I am glad to see an authoritative announcement by the First Lord of the Treasury that the Government have decided to appoint a Royal Commission upon all the questions affecting Capital and Labour, the hours of labour in Mines included. This is a decision that we can all approve. We want the fullest possible enquiry, *not* hasty legislation.

C. M. PERCY.

King Street, Wigan,

2nd March, 1891.

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

THE CONFERENCE—THE PROPOSALS BEFORE IT.

It is seldom that a Conference is held on which so much of really national importance hinges, as the representative assembly of Colliery Proprietors and Miners' Agents who met in London Jan. 21, to consider the proposal made by the men for an eight hours working day in mines. The proceedings were private, and the only knowledge furnished through the press is that the Conference was adjourned till February 11th.

The question being one which affects the welfare of the public, it will be well to state not only what the proposal is, but to shew what the effect will be if it becomes law, and also to present the arguments for and against.

It must be remembered that the proposal does not mean forty-eight working hours each week, but simply a maximum of eight hours in any one day.

I venture to write upon the measure having been directly associated with mining operations all my daily life, and having been identified with large numbers of the more intelligent of the working miners during a 23 years evening lectureship at our School of Mines in the Mining County of Lancashire.

Some 200,000 of the 600,000 miners of the United Kingdom have decided upon an eight hours working day either by Special Rule sanctioned by the Home Secretary or by Act of Parliament. Why a minority should have the hardihood to act as if it were the whole body, and why those miners who wish not only to maintain themselves from day to day, but desire to lay something by for their families should be debarred from doing so, will need a very able Miners' Agent to explain. Still a good many Members of Parliament have consented to support the demand. Probably in many cases such support has been somewhat hastely promised and without really grasping what this proposal really is.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF AN EIGHT HOURS DAY.

The arguments advanced by the leaders of the movement are :—

(1) That a lessening of the hours of labour will necessitate an increase in the number of persons employed and so reduce the numbers of the unemployed.

Such an argument is not appropriate at present because there is more work to be had in mining operations than workers, and even if it were otherwise we are scarcely called upon to so divide means of occupation as to find work for all the unemployed. There always will be a substantial proportion of the submerged tenth who by choice will remain unemployed.

(2) That the miners have not sufficient time for rest and recreation, and mental improvement.

It would not be difficult to produce statistics from every mining district in the United Kingdom shewing that the average miner does not now work so much as forty-eight hours per week, being one hour in three.

(3) That mining is an essentially unhealthy occupation.

The death rate apart from fatal accidents does not prove it and the strong and healthy appearance of the miners themselves refutes it. People who write about the unhealthiness evidently know nothing of modern mining. The air in mines is as pure as in the majority of mills and factories, and workshops. Improvements in machinery during the last half century enable us to pass through the workings of any colliery practically unlimited quantities of pure air. Miners are absolutely protected from the inclemency of the weather, and enjoy a more uniform temperature all the year round than the ordinary workman.

(4) That the character of the occupation produces great physical exhaustion.

How this can be is not easy to understand. The air they breathe is comparatively pure, and the manual exertion required is not to be compared with many other employments. Machinery, in so far as the haulage of material is concerned, to a very large extent does the heavy work of mining.

(5) That the occupation is especially dangerous and exceptionally so during the latter hours of the working day.

It is true that mining is a dangerous occupation, and as such commands a higher rate of wages, but statistics shew that a person underground in a mine, has less risk than a merchant seaman, whose remuneration is considerably less. Comparing railway servants with miners we find deaths per 10,000 railway servants 11·8; miners 19·1. Injured per 10,000 railway servants 272·2; miners 73·6. By increased care and skill, the dangers of mining have been reduced one half in thirty years, and are lessening daily. That accidents are more frequent at the end of the working day than the beginning is admitted by some and absolutely contradicted by others. Those who are inclined to admit this, say, that before work commences

every working place is inspected, and if not safe, is made safe, or failing that is closed. As the day goes on the operation of mining lessens the safety, but a shortened working day would not improve measures. A miner with reasonable time to do his day's work is less likely to neglect the safe guarding of his working place, any neglect of which not only endangers his own life, but the lives of his fellow workmen, than a man who as to hurry to accomplish a day's work in too short a period. The temptation would be too strong to run a greater risk for the sake of increased earnings.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST AN EIGHT HOURS DAY.

There is not much else that is said, or that can be said in favour of an eight hours working day for miners, and I now proceed to state some of the arguments against.

(*First.*) A compulsory eight hours working day would operate unequally, therefore unfairly, and press heavily on a good many collieries. It is quite evident that in thick and easily worked seams, and where the general body of the working places are comparatively near the pit shaft, a working day could conveniently be shorter than in a thin and not easily worked seam and where the working places are distant. The natural conditions vary, and one uniform day would give some an advantage and place others at a disadvantage. We can no more have with fairness a uniform day than we can have uniform wages.

(*Second.*) It would inevitably reduce the output of coal, because at present a miner if he wishes can have eight hours actual work each day, and make up on certain days the deficiency of previous ones, but should eight hours be adopted the average day of actual work will probably not exceed six hours for the miners. In an engineering establishment, or a great iron and steel works, or a cotton mill, the whole body of workers can commence and finish simultaneously, but in a

mine it is different. The workmen have to be lowered into the mine in detachments, and at a large colliery more than half an hour is occupied in the descent and a similar period in the ascent of the whole number. The proposed diminution of hours for all persons underground will also affect the miner in another way. At present he is underground from eight to nine hours, and to enable him to do so a class of workmen known as "daywage men" require to work about ten hours. If these men can only be underground for a period of eight hours instead of ten, the time during which the miner will be employed in coal getting cannot exceed six hours. In times of bad trade many pits do not work more than three days a week, and a miner's week's work amounting to little more than eighteen hours would cause a terrible decrease in his earnings. That miners have a desire to work longer hours on certain days is well known. It is notorious that in times of bad trade when collieries work only a few days per week, the miners incline to work longer to make their earnings as large as possible.

The position of workmen paid at a fixed rate for so many hours has evidently not been considered. There are at least 10 ½ per cent of the 600,000 who never enter the mine, being employed on the surface, and who work about 54 hours per week. Their services are only required when the pit is actually raising coal, and if we reduce actual coal getting to six hours per day, as just shewn, all these men would lose one-third of their wages.

(*Third.*) It would reduce wages, because the value of coal and the demand for coal is by reason of its necessity in our most important manufactures. Not less than 100,000,000 tons per year (being more than half the entire production of the United Kingdom) is consumed in that way. These manufactures are not for home consumption wholly or chiefly. The whole world is our market, and in that market we have not only no monopoly, but have keen and ever increasing competition. The material resources of America have long been known, but the

enormous development of these resources in recent years has not been so well known. America commenced iron and steel manufacture a generation or two ago. Last year the production exceeded that of the United Kingdom (in pig iron alone over 10,000,000 tons were made) and in a few years the present production will be doubled. This means that we shall have to face increased competition on the part of America in markets at present almost our own, and at no distant date may have to face their competition on our own soil not only in iron and steel but even in coal. Shall we improve our position by doing something which will unnaturally force up the price of coal, increasing the cost of production of everything in which coal plays an important part? Lessening the hours of labour must increase the cost of coal getting, and to counteract that the profits, if any, would have to be reduced and wages would have to be diminished. We may bolster up prices artificially for a time, but the real price of an article is what it will fetch in the market in open competition.

(*Fourth.*) A compulsory eight hours working day would be an unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the subject, and the wonder to me is that a body of liberty loving Englishmen will propose to barter away that liberty. The right of regulating the hours of labour of women and children is admitted, and limitation in their hours is now law at all collieries. It applies not only to boys underground, but also to women and boys employed on the surface. I recognise the right of Parliament to interfere with too prolonged hours of labour, even of men engaged in an exceptionally unhealthy occupation, or upon whose care the safety of the public depends, but with these exceptions, in a free country, men should be free to regulate their own hours of labour. Compulsory enactments, whether by Parliament or Trades Union combinations not distinctly beneficial, are inevitably injurious.

MISTAKEN NOTIONS OF THE PUBLIC.

If the general reader knew something of real mining in the present day, there would be more accurate writing and speaking. Half a century ago when mines were badly worked and badly ventilated, and men and women and children worked like beasts of burden, twelve and fourteen hours every day, the national sentiment was roused, but now all is altered.

No female can be employed underground, and no boy can be employed for more than a limited number of hours per day and per week. Perfect ventilation and every provision for safety is compulsory by law. Inspectors of mines devote their time to seeing that everything that tends to safety is provided, and they have power to enter mines and prosecute owners and managers for sins of omission and commission. The average hours of labour of grown-up men in all the collieries of the United Kingdom, do not amount to forty-eight per week, including time for meals. Of the 600,000 miners, their employment is more congenial to the vast majority than any other kind of manual labour would be, and the rule is, that once a miner, always a miner.

The eight hours working day seem to some well intentioned citizens a measure affecting only the colliery proprietor and the miner. They think the one would not suffer and the other would benefit by the change. I have tried to shew that it would injure both these classes, and would have a far more reaching influence and affect the nation.

THE WRITER'S CLAIM TO SPEAK.

I have stated my view of the measure boldly as having some claim to speak. In two Parliamentary campaigns, one in 1885 in the Ince Division of Lancashire, and one in 1886 in the County Borough of Wigan, both having a large mining population, I advocated the just claims put forward by the miners, and indeed supported their full programme as then

adopted by themselves. I had the approval of the large bodies of working miners whose spokesman I was, and the Miners' Agents stood and spoke upon my platform, but just as I supported the amendments made in the Mines' Act of 1887, because likely to do good, I now oppose and have always opposed the eight hours working day as certain to be injurious.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE MOVEMENT.

(*First.*) Injurious to the employer, in surrounding him with fresh responsibilities and additional liabilities, reducing his legitimate profit, and lessening the value of his capital.

(*Second.*) Injurious to the workman in depriving him of his liberty and permanently reducing his wages, thereby reducing his capital, because labour is his capital; especially injurious to the thrifty workman, and unless all the loss falls upon the Colliery Proprietor and the Miner, it will be

(*Third.*) Injurious to the coal consumer, because the price he would have to pay would be enhanced—and

(*Lastly and Chiefly.*) Injurious to the nation by artificially increasing the price of coal without increasing its value, thus placing us at a disadvantage with other countries with whom we have to compete, in coal itself and all manufactures in which coal is essential.

There are many proposals at present which, if brought into practice, would not be beneficial to the trade and commerce of England, but there are none more fraught with danger than the eight hours movement amongst the miners, and probably the greatest danger is to themselves.

My hope is, that reason and common sense will prevail, and the proposal be withdrawn.

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

My previous letter has, as might have been expected, attracted a good deal of attention, and also naturally enough, has brought me a good deal of correspondence, and it will be well now, especially in view of the Second Meeting of the Conference of the Representatives of Colliery Owners and Miners to add something to what my earlier letter contained.

Nothing addressed to myself or to the press, alters in any degree my earnest conviction that we are in peril of a great danger, and that the proposed Eight Hours Working Day in Mines, would result in great national disaster and individual injury to the Miners.

With regard to the Colliery Proprietors, it is no province of mine to appeal for them; my sympathies have ever been, and are, with the miners in everything tending to their benefit, and as a patriotic citizen I am ever anxious for the national good, and opposed to everything likely to be a national evil.

HOURS A MINER NOW WORKS.

Some exception has been taken to my statement that the average period at present spent in the mine, from bank to bank, does not amount to 48 hours per week. But the corroborations are far more numerous than the exceptions, and it has been pointed out to me that I have made an over-estimate. Very few collieries work six days a week, and the number of absentees on each working day is seldom under 10 per cent, and at many collieries considerably more.

IS MINING UNHEALTHY?

As regards the healthiness or unhealthiness of Mining, I know of no sturdier section of the community. I have some interesting information from the Sick and Burial Club of a large colliery with which I am intimately acquainted. Taking a period of five years, ending 1890, the average number of persons employed was 652. The total number of deaths from natural causes during that period was 21, being an average annual mortality of less than seven in 1,000; and comprising all ages from 12 years to 70; the average age at death being 47. Another colliery employing near upon 2,000 people had during a period of nine years an average annual death-rate from natural causes of about eight per thousand.

In the 45th Annual Report of the Registrar General, we find it said "*The death rates of coal miners are surprisingly low.*"

WHEN ARE MINING ACCIDENTS MOST FREQUENT?

There has been considerable dissent to my even partial admission that the accidents in Mines may be more numerous during the end of the working day. Even if that were so, it appeared to me to be easily explainable, but it is said that in some of our Mining Districts there is no difference, whilst in other Mining Districts accidents are actually more frequent in the earlier part of the working day. Probably there are no sufficiently reliable statistics to prove the matter either way. A recent Parliamentary Return obtained by my friend, Mr. Fenwick, M.P., would seem to show that we have had more explosions early in the day than late, but my reference included accidents of all kinds, and I had in my mind the more numerous accidents by falls of roof, &c., and which are responsible for the greater number of our fatalities. My argument was that a hurried working day would increase the danger at *all* hours of the day.

UNFAIRNESS OF A UNIFORM DAY.

In presenting my argument against the Eight Hours Movement, I said that to have a uniform length of working day would operate unequally, and as a consequence unfairly.

Some seams of coal are thick and easily worked, and a man may bring down his quantity in a comparatively short day. Other seams of coal are thin and not so easily worked, and a longer day is necessary to enable the needful quantity to be brought down. The coal more easily worked may be even more valuable than the coal less easily worked, and to put these on the same level would operate unjustly. Then again, in one colliery we have large amounts of coal within easy reach, and in another colliery the working places at a considerable distance. Collieries are not similar, and must adapt their hours to their respective necessities. And then taking individual cases, one man will do a day's work in less time than another.

WILL AN EIGHT HOURS DAY REDUCE THE OUTPUT?

That this will be so is evident when we compare the present condition of things with the arrangements proposed. The hours of labour are not the same in all the mining districts. Some commence winding coal at six and continue winding coal without any interval till two; others have an interval of about half an hour midway, and continue winding coal till about half-past two; others have two intervals, and go on winding coal till three o'clock or half-past; others again only commence winding coal at half-past seven, and, with an exception of half an hour interval, go on winding coal till four o'clock.

But putting aside exceptional cases which go on somewhat longer, we may take it that the usual practice at single shift collieries is to have eight hours winding coal. If we add to this the time of letting down and time of getting up, the time of getting to working places and getting back, we

shall arrive at say nine hours as the average time from bank to bank for the miners, and probably from nine and a half to ten and a half hours for the daywagemen. If by one sweep we enact that no man shall be more than eight hours from bank to bank, we reduce the period by which a miner can be getting coal certainly by one hour, and very probably by two hours.

WILL MINERS WAGES BE REDUCED?

The diminished number of working hours means a reduction in each man's quantity of coal, and will increase the cost of working, because everybody knows that an increased output reduces the cost per ton, and a reduced output increases the cost per ton, even although a miner receives the same amount per ton. The miner getting a less amount of coal will get less wages. No, no, say the Eight Hours advocates, give the miner a proportionately increased price per ton, put up the selling prices and let the British Public pay. Verily it would be an exceeding comfortable state of affairs if Colliery Proprietors could fix their own profits and miners fix their own wages by simply putting up the price and making the British Public pay. If it were possible, would it be fair? I say no, although I do believe that this long suffering body of individuals, the British Public, will find their prices increased, because in bad times—and we have had bad times before, and shall have bad times again,—there is a point beyond which prices cannot fall, because it would not pay to produce the coal and that minimum would be raised because expenses of production would be increased without advancing any persons wages.

But I mentioned in my previous letter foreign competition and my references to America were not mere idle theories. In Iron and Steel manufactures and in other Industries, we, in England, use a vast amount of coal every year. In Iron and Steel especially, America is already at our very door. I

go further than this, even in coal itself we are within measurable distance of having to compete with American coal in England. There are large collieries in America with great outputs of coal, visited last Autumn by hundreds of English Iron and Steel Manufacturers, at which coal in great abundance and high quality is being worked, and it is being put into Railway Wagons and sold at 75 cents a ton, being slightly over three shillings.

I need say little, as to the enormous coal resources of America, they are well nigh as extensive as the Continent itself, and tracts equal in area to the entire Coal Fields of England can be had, land, timber, and coal, at £1 an acre, freehold. With facts like these staring us in the face, can we in England afford to do injury to ourselves?

To the miners themselves I especially speak. There are no comforts obtainable that I would deny them; no wages that legitimate trade will afford that I would begrudge them; but an Eight Hours working day will be an advance backwards.

I do not again wish to occupy space or time in referring to the unwisdom of sacrificing an Englishman's proudest boast, his liberty—although for my part I would oppose the Eight Hours Movement even on that ground alone. I am arguing now against it because it must and will affect the miner in a very serious degree. It will in no way lessen his danger; it will not improve his health; it will inevitably reduce the amount of his earnings in any one day; no lost time can be made up, and there will be no opportunity for recovering the losses consequent upon a serious and it may be a prolonged illness.

A miner with characteristic independence and love of liberty will resent the attempted restriction, and the industrious and thrifty miner who wants no workhouse in his old age, will be alarmed at the proposals to prevent him putting something by for a time of need.

AN APPEAL TO THE CONFERENCE.

In a few days the Conference will meet again, and continue, possibly complete its deliberations; upon that Conference a heavy responsibility rests, and I earnestly hope that its members will realise that responsibility and be equal to it.

No doubt it is quite natural that Colliery Proprietors who have invested an enormous Capital which is irremovable, and which for many years realised nothing, or next to nothing, should desire now amidst somewhat better times, to prevent so far as they can any blighting of their prosperity.

It is quite natural also that the miners who, for a long period were anything but overpaid, should now in a more prosperous epoch, endeavour by all legitimate means to make permanent, as they think, this better condition of things.

I wish well to both, and have ever endeavoured to support measures likely to injure neither. But there is to me an interest higher than that of the Colliery Proprietors; above that of the Miner; namely, the interest of the nation. We in England cannot afford to act rashly. America, with her unlimited resources, having practically the materials for everything within herself, may pass silly enactments, can sow the wind, and is able to afford to reap the whirlwind; the American Continent in material wealth of every kind, is the spoiled child of Nature.

It is not so with us at home, we have to maintain our position, proud and honourable, by skill and energy and wisdom. Skill and energy finds ample representatives on both sides at the Conference. I sincerely hope that wisdom may prevail, and that proposals, the national and industrial mischief arising from which will only be properly and fully realised when in operation, will be unreservedly withdrawn. If this is done the Conference will have accomplished much; if not, there are breakers ahead for the mining industry.

[Letter No. 3.]

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

To the Editors of "The Labour Tribune."

Since your deservedly popular and widely read workmen's newspaper came into existence no issue has appeared that I have not received and read; and upon practically every matter that has agitated the workmen's mind your views and my own have been in unison. Upon the most stirring labour question of the time, the proposed eight hours working day, we are opposed; and I now merely ask for the same opportunity of expressing my opinion, not in agreement with your own, that has always been extended to me when we thought alike.

I have already stated in articles which have appeared elsewhere that the proposed Eight Hours Bill should be opposed because it can benefit no section of the community of these realms, and will do general harm. You will, I know, believe my honesty when I say that a great reason for my opposition is that it will injure those it is intended to benefit, namely, the miners themselves. That my sympathies have ever been with them needs no argument here.

The eight hours arrangement will, if adopted, reduce the wages of miners, and no reader and no correspondent of your paper would deplore reduction in their wages more than myself. I have shown my sympathy in the past; I never had that sympathy stronger than now. Very well, your readers will say, show us how our earnings will be reduced. We have been told, and many of us believe, the reverse. To show that reduction will be inevitable does not seem difficult.

It is proposed to make a maximum day of eight hours for every man engaged in a mine. That includes not only actual getters of coal, but all those who must make longer hours than the miner is at work, and if such are limited to eight hours, miners must perforce be content with a good deal less. It will be said that is no difficulty. You can have men in the mine continuously, if you wish, but no individual must be or can be there for a period exceeding eight hours. That is so, but employing more people means increased expense. Can mining afford it? Can England afford it? I say, No. In my paper on "Mine Rent and Mineral Royalties," which the *Labour Tribune* eulogised and which the vast majority of English miners read, I ventured to mention, as a danger to industrial England, namely, foreign competition. That was a reality, and no mere music hall "bogie man."

Is that danger lessening? I say it is increasing by leaps and bounds. America, which has for years been the refuge for millions of our surplus population, and a very elysium for many of our starving poor, is now our most pressing and increasing danger. The great bulk of England's coal is used in producing something else, and in all the materials for that something else the natural resources of America are so great and so easily and cheaply developed, that very little now would make the difference by which American manufactures would undersell us even in England.

In the matter of coal I have had offers in American States of timber and land and coal at £1 an acre freehold, and with good means of transit. Not three months ago I was asked to induce English capital for collieries and iron and steel and engineering works in an undeveloped part of America, to which railways are being made, and equal in mineral wealth to the whole of the United Kingdom. American coal is even now being put in railway wagons and in barges at three shillings a ton—a price which would well-nigh enable it to pay its freight to England and undersell us here.

Some readers will say, copy the example of America and shut their production out as they endeavour to shut ours out. As well suggest the restoration of the Heptarchy and the resuscitation of Queen Anne. We are, as Napoleon said, "a nation of shop-keepers" and want and must have, markets for our wares, otherwise we cannot exist.

Have I, my friends, the editors of this labour organ, made my views clear? I protest against this attempt to wilfully barter our supremacy as a free and great commercial nation in support of a mere sentiment of eight hours work, eight hours sleep, and eight hours play.

In very much of England's trade to-day there is not much margin for indiscretion. The 100,000,000 tons of coal per year used in manufactures can ruin these manufactures if made too dear; the remaining 70,000,000 or 80,000,000 tons per year would need but little increase in price to force American coal into England.

America can play, can afford to play tricks with herself; a McKinley Tariff may pass one Congress and be repealed by the next, and the whole proceeding be a mere episode producing mere temporary inconveniences. With England it is different; our trade removed, like our "bold peasantry destroyed," can never be restored. I have entered my protest, and given my word of warning. A compulsory eight hours working day in mines means the destruction of English industries, diminished means of employment, and reduced wages.

[Letter No. 4.]

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

To the Editors of "The Labour Tribune."

Sir,—You have my hearty thanks for your courtsey in publishing my previous letter; such courtsey I expected—it is characteristic of the *Tribune*. I am not at all distressed, and do not feel even a little bit crushed at the replies to my letter. My opponents and myself differ on this particular question. We are agreed in our desire to benefit the mining community. Assertions that I have never seen the bottom of a pit-shaft, and that I am giving myself a cheap advertisement, are not arguments, and they are not true.

I have seen the top and bottom of very many pit-shafts, and I need no advertisement, cheap or otherwise, amongst the miners of the United Kingdom. I have assisted in their battles before; my sympathies are unchanged.

I oppose an eight hours bank to bank day because it will inevitably reduce the miner's wages. He will get less coal, and the price of this commodity is not regulated, cannot be regulated by the colliery proprietor and the miner. The price is regulated by what it is worth in other industries.

The great coal consumer is the iron-maker, and how do we stand in iron-making now? For months nearly every blast-furnace in Scotland has been idle, and yet iron has gone down in price steadily and surely and continuously, and if I mistake not, the workmen have gone back to work at a very substantial reduction in wages. Iron-works are closing north and south, and at the present time iron is costing more to make than it can fetch in the market. Why? Because coal is too dear. This cannot continue, and either we shall cease iron-making, and coal cannot be sold; or coal must come down in price, and this is no time for aggravating a bad condition of affairs.

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

To the Editor of "The Colliery Guardian."

Sir,—The Conference is at an end, and probably you will convenience your readers with the official minutes of the proceedings at both meetings, which have now been made public. I am not at all clear why such proceedings were ever private. The matter under consideration is one of public interest, and has been discussed upon hundreds of public platforms. From public deliberations we get correct reports; private conferences produce a score of different accounts, all more or less inaccurate.

It appears that both meetings were thoroughly representative; at the first nothing was done except hearing the miners' demand for an eight hours "bank-to-bank" day, and arguments in support. The second and concluding meeting was wholly occupied with the proprietors' reply. The miners' representatives asked, and the proprietors—after hearing all that could be said—answered NO, and gave their reasons.

It appears to me, from reading the official report, that certain points were placed beyond dispute.

First.—That an eight hours day would operate unfairly in different districts; with different collieries in the same district; with different men in the same mine.

Second.—That an eight hours day would substantially reduce the output of coal by shortening the period of actual coal-getting.

Third.—That wages would be reduced, because the period of work would be diminished, and colliers are paid so much per ton.

Fourth.—That the cost of production per ton would be increased, because diminished output means an additional expense per ton.

Fifth.—That we should incur a great risk of so increasing the cost of proportion of manufactures in which coal plays an important part as to seriously damage such manufactures. Already coal is so dear that iron and steel can hardly be made at a profit, and as a consequence iron and steel works are closing.

To the mind of the general reader these points being proved should be conclusive, and to no one more so than the miner himself. But there are other points, perhaps, which cannot be decisively settled one way or the other without special enquiry, namely :—

First.—The hours during which, under present arrangements, miners are at work.

Second.—The condition of ventilation and the amount of fresh air provided in mines.

Third.—The healthiness of mining operations as compared with other industries.

Fourth.—The number of accidents in mines as compared with other occupations.

Fifth.—The period of the working day when accidents in mines are most numerous.

As regards all these, the colliery proprietors have expressed their willingness to co-operate in obtaining a joint committee of asters and men, or a Royal Commission, to arrive at the actual dition of affairs. There really ought to be no difficulty, and

whilst I am strongly of opinion that to restrict labour in England and have to compete with unrestricted labour abroad, would be ruinous to us, probably such an enquiry, thorough and complete, would result in considerable improvement in matters of detail, and put an end to an impossible and an impracticable proposal.

There is good reason to believe that a preponderating majority even of those who have expressed themselves in favour of eight hours bank to bank, have only done so under false hopes of increased wages. If it reduced them, what then? Miners are, in my opinion, in common with other workmen, entitled to the highest wages that their industry will legitimately afford, but trade cannot be forced, and, in England at any rate, wages cannot be artificially advanced.

There is to be an International Workmen's Congress next month, and one leading miners agent has been rash enough to hint at the possibility of laying idle every colliery in England Europe and America. That miners can do all this I believe, but they will not. Even at home, Northumberland and Durham will have no connection with the eight hours movement. Anything approaching a universal strike will be made impossible by the men themselves. The eight hours agitation is a waste of time and energy and money, and if continued can result only in bad feeling and injury to coal-mining and other industries in England.

Mau

[Letter No. 6.]

MINERS & THE EIGHT HOURS MOVEMENT.

To the Editor of "The Warrington Examiner."

Sir,—For the courteous reference to myself in your leading columns of February 14th I thank you. I gather that only my first article on miners and the eight hours movement has come under your notice, and I now send copies of articles which followed, and which, perhaps, may make my opinions more clear. I need not here set out at length my reasons for strenuously opposing a compulsory eight hours bank to bank day in mining operations. As a life-long Liberal, my Liberalism meaning free trade and freedom of trade, I oppose such a proposal as an *unwarrantable* interference with trade, and with the liberty of the workmen and the employer.

I oppose it as a miner's friend and as a citizen, because it will neither improve health nor lessen danger. I oppose it because it will reduce the production of coal, increase the cost, and reduce wages. I oppose it because in all our principal manufacutures, iron and steel especially, in which we have severe and increasing competition with other nations, it will increase the cost of manufacture and ruin them. You in Warrington know something of the iron trade. Is it flourishing now? Would you like to see its burdens increased? Coal is already so dear that iron is scarcely being made at a profit, and iron and steel works are closing. America our great competitor,

is now making 10,000,000 of pig iron a year against a little over 8,000,000 tons in England, and steel proportionately; and America is putting good coal into railway waggons and selling at *three* shillings a ton.

The price of coal in England you know as well as I do. Ere many years have passed away we shall have American made iron and steel, and American coal in England. You say that mine rents and way-leave charges is several millions more per year than wages. If you average 180,000,000 tons of coal at eightpence a ton you have £6,000,000; and if you average 600,000 persons at thirty shillings a week you have £45,000,000. You will see from published official report of conference that the colliery proprietors are willing to have a joint enquiry as to (1), present hours of labour; (2), healthiness of mining; (3), period of working day when accidents are most numerous. The miners should accept this offer, and have an enquiry.

C. M. PERCY.

King Street, Wigan.
1891.

MR. C. M. PERCY'S

WORK ON THE

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING OF COLLIERIES.

VOLUME 1. — WITH 250 ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOLUME 2. — WITH 250 ILLUSTRATIONS,

AND

FRONTISPIECE PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR.